

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Lincoln Theatre
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1215 U Street, N.W. not for publication
city, town Washington vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county N/A code 001 zip code 20009

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Robert L. Mallett 8/27/93
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

[Signature] 10/27/93
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
RECREATION AND CULTURE; Theatre

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
RECREATION AND CULTURE; Theatre

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation masonry
walls brick

roof pressed metal
other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Lincoln Theatre is a large, freestanding masonry building which occupies Lot 80 in Square 273. The immediate locale is defined by eclectic located 19th/early 20th century commercial and residential buildings of a generally modest scale.

The exterior of the theatre is relatively simple. The 50-foot high principal facade is a fully-developed symmetrical composition featuring neoclassical design which is typical of the period. A well-defined base, which resembles finished stone, has a central, recessed entrance with a large square marquee. The upper facade is of tan colored brick and has a large-scaled central window which is set within a slightly projecting bay. The three-part window is surmounted by a decorated recessed panel in its arched head, which employs a fan motif and other neoclassical motifs in pressed metal. A primary cornice beneath the brick parapet is enriched by its center pediment and running frieze which bears the inscription "LINCOLN THEATER."

The side and rear facades are faced with common red brick and lack any notable details. The northern part of the lot is currently undeveloped. The immediate area contains eclectic, modestly scaled commercial buildings.

The interior of the Lincoln is highly ornamented and is notable for its well-preserved state. The lobby, circulation spaces and main auditorium feature neoclassically-derived plaster details which are typical of the period and continue the motifs of the main facade. The ticket booth in the lobby is embellished with classically styled busts and medallions. Much of the decorative plaster was painted a deep bronze and highlighted in copper.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage/Black

Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1921 - 1954

Significant Dates

1921

1927

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Geare, Reginald W.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Lincoln Theatre is a rare surviving early movie theatre, which survives as a major element of the historic U Street commercial corridor within the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The Lincoln was completed in 1921 in the sumptuous style of the grand movie palaces of the day. The neoclassical theatre retains a high degree of its architectural integrity and is among the most notable remaining buildings which define the culturally important U Street commercial corridor. The Lincoln is especially significant as one of only a few first-run early movie theatres which remain in Washington, for its architecture, and as a major historical element of the predominantly black U Street commercial corridor.

The Lincoln Theatre is a splendid example of a major "first run" neighborhood movie house of the 1920s, which echoes the spirit and life that pervaded the U Street corridor in the first half of the twentieth century, when it was known as the gateway to the best of Washington's black community. It was the center of the black business community and the heart of black culture and entertainment. Theatres, dance halls, cabarets and restaurants lined the street, attracting the country's best entertainers, Pearl Bailey, Billie Holiday, Nat King Cole and Duke Ellington among them. U Street was often referred to as the "Black Broadway." The Lincoln, along with the Howard, Dunbar, Republic, Hiawatha, Booker T, and several small movie houses were clustered in the area; today only the Lincoln and Howard remain intact.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Jones, William H., Recreation and Amusement Among Negroes in Washington, D.C., Westport, Connecticut: Negro University Press, 1927.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Public Library, Washingtoniana Collection.

Overbeck, Ruth Ann, et. al., D.C. "Blacks In the Arts" Shaw School Urban Renewal Area -- 1963, September 30, 1988.

National Archives and Record Services

District of Columbia Building Permits, Record Group No. 351, National Archives and Record Services, Square 273, 1877-1940.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property less than one

UTM References

A 18 3 2 4 0 6 0 4 3 0 9 3 0 0
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Lincoln Theatre occupies Lot 801 of Square 273 in the District of Columbia.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The subject lot, 801, has historically defined the Lincoln Theatre property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Luci Blackburn, Project Manager
 organization D.C. Government, OBED date July 30, 1993
 street & number 717 14th St., N.W., 10th Floor telephone (202) 727-6600
 city or town Washington state DC zip code 20005

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Lincoln Theatre
Washington, D.C.

The auditorium, which has approximately 1240 seats, has eight rounded boxes and a large balcony overlooking an elaborately carved and hand painted proscenium arch framing a 38 foot wide stage. Fluted Corinthian columns support large archways on either side of the stage. The high ceilings feature ornate chandeliers and moldings. Along the walls are recessed and molded arches covered with wallpaper adorned with large tropical birds. Plaster bas-relief roundels of President Abraham Lincoln, for whom the theatre is named, line the walls above the arches. However, in contrast, the balcony area is relatively devoid of decoration, reflecting its less prominent status and less expensive seating. There is no decorative plaster or wallpaper on the walls, and only one solid wall color. Only a small ornate plaster ring surrounds the ceiling fixtures.

Much of the neat and orderly details of the theatre suggest, to some degree, the neoclassicism associated with the Scottish architects and designers, Robert and James Adam. The stock decoration and restrained neoclassicism of the overall theatre are characteristic of the period. The formal aesthetics of the Lincoln stand in contrast to many other first-run American movie houses of the 1920s, many of which were designed as counterparts to the romantic and adventurous Hollywood films of that period, typically including flamboyant, historical and stylistic references, bold architectural treatments, original art, and dramatic lighting to achieve spectacular and innovative atmospheres.

Unlike many other Washington, D.C. theatres, the Lincoln retained a high degree of its original historical integrity. The decorative plaster, elaborate ticket booth, terrazzo flooring, and brick facade have been restored to their original appearance.

Detailed paint analysis was undertaken throughout the theatre auditorium and lobby to determine original paint colors, which were then replicated during the restoration of 1989 through 1993. Samples of the original wallpaper, which was severely darkened with dirt, were taken and cleaned. The wallpaper was then reproduced. All remaining plaster work which was salvageable was repaired; missing or unsalvageable plaster has been replicated. All remaining original light fixtures were restored or replicated. The old theatre draperies, which were soiled and disintegrating, were removed, and are being reproduced, including the tassels and fringes.

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While the original theatre seats were no longer in the theatre at the time of restoration, and no photographs exist showing the seats, old seats from another theatre were restored in a design typical of the early 1920s. The exact number of seats at the time the theatre opened is not known, though it is assumed to have been a larger number than current building code requirements require. As a result, larger aisle width and seat spacing have been employed. In addition, other "modernization" was undertaken to comply with building codes and to equip the theatre so it can operate as an up-to-date performing arts facility. New HVAC, sound and lighting systems, stage rigging, and movie projectors are examples of the modernization of the building. Accessibility for the disabled was also included to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

With the completion of the restoration in 1993, the historic appearance and character of the Lincoln Theatre has been reestablished.

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The Lincoln Theatre was designed by Reginald Geare, a local architect, who designed a number of theatre buildings in the region, including Washington's first movie "palace," the Knickerbocker. It was built by Harry M. Crandall, Washington's foremost movie theatre operator in the early years of the motion picture industry. Harry Crandall began building his theatre empire in 1907 and at the height of his career owned eighteen theatres in Washington, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia. His theatres were well-regarded in the community and many times featured elegant and opulent designs formerly reserved for opera houses. His chain included such first-rate movie houses as the Apollo, the Metropolitan, the Tivoli and the ill-fated Knickerbocker, whose roof collapsed in a snow storm killing many patrons and is said to have led to the later suicides of both Crandall and Reginald Geare, the architect.

By the 1920s, the movie theatre had become a well-defined building type in Washington. Following the first presentation of Edison's kinetiscopes in 1895, early nickelodeons and converted storefronts proliferated to satisfy the popular fascination for moving images. By 1908, the city had 25 movie houses showing silent films with live music and special sound effects. By 1910, that number had increased to over 75. The larger downtown houses, including the Fox, Palace, Metropolitan, Columbia, Warner, and Keith, offered first screenings of new pictures, but given the laws of segregation, catered almost solely to a white clientele. The Lincoln, from the beginning, showed "first-run" movies primarily for Black patrons. These shows were later presented in the numerous "neighborhood" houses throughout the city.

In 1926, Crandall merged with the Stanley chain, and in 1927, the Stanley-Crandall corporation was sold to Warner Brothers. Although Crandall amassed a great fortune from his theatre chain, he nevertheless went bankrupt after selling his interests. The despondent Crandall committed suicide in 1937.

While the majority of Crandall's theatres were sold to Warner Brothers, the Lincoln Theatre found its way into the hands of another theatre magnate in 1927, A.E. Lichtman. Lichtman started his theatre business in Brooklyn, New York, and expanded

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into the Washington area when he began leasing the Howard Theatre. He eventually acquired sixteen theatres, among them the Rosalia, Rafield, Mott, Booker T, Republic, Strand and Deanwood Theatres, which catered primarily to black audiences. Lichtman's holdings also included "combination" houses, theatres which featured both motion pictures and cabarets. The Lincoln Theatre was remodeled about the time Lichtman acquired it to add a dance hall at the rear of the theatre. The Colonnade, as it was known, became a major drawing card for the theatre.

Lichtman was unusual among white theatre operators in Washington in that he recognized the demand for first-rate movie houses among Washington's blacks. Capitalizing on the theatre's prime location along the thriving U Street corridor, Lichtman turned the Lincoln Theatre into a first-class movie house for Washington's black community. Under Lichtman's ownership, the Lincoln became "perhaps the largest and the finest for colored people exclusively anywhere in the U.S." (The Afro-American, January 4, 1924.)

The theatre offered black audiences a chance to see first-run pictures without waiting for white theatres to conclude their runs, and an opportunity to see the leading performers in the nation. It provided the black community with equal access to high-quality entertainment generally reserved for white audiences, and hosted the same acts and performers found at the illustrious Cotton Club and Apollo Theatre in New York City. In addition to its first-run movies, the Lincoln also featured news reels and black pictures. The Lincoln Theatre is a significant element of the parallel society created by segregation in Washington and the development of separate cultural institutions within the black community.

Unwelcome within most of the white commercial areas due to segregation, Washington's black community developed its own center for night life and entertainment along the U Street corridor during the first half of the twentieth century.

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Between Ninth and Eighteenth Streets, N.W., U Street teemed with black-owned businesses, including banks, theatres, restaurants, skating rinks, dance halls, and bowling alleys, which attracted a cross-section of black Washington and became its primarily commercial zone.

The Lincoln Theatre was one of three movie houses on U Street. However, with its dance hall, the Colonnade, the Lincoln was by far the finest, most popular night spot along the strip. Located in the basement at the rear of the theatre, and accessed through a long tunnel, the Colonnade hosted some of the finest entertainers in the country. Performers such as Fats Waller, Bessie Smith, the Mills Brothers and Lena Horne played to full houses at the Colonnade. Stars of Hollywood and Broadway attended birthday balls for President Roosevelt at the Lincoln Colonnade in February of 1942 and 1943. The Washington Afro-American, proclaimed, "color prejudice and discrimination take a holiday," when such stars as Jimmy Stewart, Dorothy Lamour, Roy Rogers, James Cagney and Rosalind Russell attended the birthday balls.

The nationally-known performers were not the only ones to attract long lines outside the hall, however. The Colonnade was inextricably tied to its community, and local activities were just as much a drawing card as other acts. The Club's facilities were routinely used by local organizations, charities and universities (most often Howard University) for dances, meetings and fund-raisers.

A.E. Lichtman is credited with the unwavering success of the Lincoln Theatre and was well-respected for his support of the black community. As a manager, Lichtman was unusual among the city's white theatre operators who served black movie patrons. As a Jewish businessperson, he was an active supporter of numerous local causes within the black community. He was a benefactor to the Boy's Club, the YMCA, the YWCA and the servicemen's club, and his employment practices were widely admired. It was said that of 434 workers associated with Lichtman, including managers and supervisors, only 11 were white. In contrast, Harry Crandall's employment practices allegedly engendered a boycott by the local black newspaper, the Bee.

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The Lincoln, along with the movie business in Washington, experienced an enormous increase in patronage during World War II, due to the massive influx of war workers to the city. The Lincoln Theatre and the Colonnade were at their most profitable during the 1930's and 1940s and operated two box offices to accommodate the public. However, the forces which established racial segregation in Washington began to weaken after the War. In 1953, a year before the Supreme Court declared segregation unconstitutional, the local movie chain, K-B, encouraged other operators to open their theatres to black patrons. Desegregation began with three Loews theatres, the Capital, Columbia and Palace, and was aided by the reserved ticket system for admission to Cinerama films.

After 1954, as societal and statutory segregation began to unravel, the U Street corridor and the Lincoln Theatre entered a period of decline. In the 1950s, the Lincoln featured primarily movies, moving from first-run premieres to older and lower budget films. The Colonnade closed its doors and was demolished in the late 1950s. After sporadic operations, the Lincoln finally closed in the early 1970s.

In recognition of its important role in the history of Washington and its architectural significance, the Lincoln Theatre is currently undergoing restoration, which will return it to service as a fully operational theatre. As one of the most significant buildings within the U Street corridor, the Lincoln is strongly tied to local social history and serves to convey the development of the locale as an important cultural and commercial district. As an intact movie theatre constructed in 1921, the Lincoln is especially valuable as one of only a few surviving examples in Washington, D.C. Its classically-inspired details and overall form are typical for the period. However, as the representative body of movie theatres in Washington has been reduced to a few examples possessing varying degrees of aesthetic merit, the historical and architectural character of the remarkably well-preserved Lincoln represents a very important resource of Washington, D.C.

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The Lincoln Theatre, Application for Historic Preservation Certification, Part 1,
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, prepared by Anne
H. Adams, August 29, 1985.

Thomas, Bettye Collier-, Howard Theatre "The Theatre for the People" 1910-1970, Center
for African American History and Culture, Temple University, Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania, 1990.

Record of Interview with Graham Barbee, former Executive Director of Lichtman's
Theatres, conducted by Phyllis Wisenfelder and Lynn Kletzkin, January 15, 1985.

"Washington's You Street," Newspic, Vol. 6, No. 4 (April, 1946), pp. 5-7.

Vertical Files